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'*Restitutions of Body and Soil*' in *Mies Julie* (2012): South African theatre audience receptions of Yaël Farber's adaptation of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* within a post-apartheid South African political landscape

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Yaël Farber's 2012 adaptation of August Strindberg's classic play Miss Julie entitled Mies Julie and subtitled Restitutions of Body and Soil since The Bantu Land Act No. 27 of 1913 and The Immorality Act No. 5 of 1927, received rave reviews internationally, earned a great number of awards, had sold-out performances and often received standing ovations from various international audiences. In this article I discuss why South African audiences' experience of Yaël Farber's South African adaptation of a classic play, Strindberg's Miss Julie, would differ to some extent from international audiences' reception of the play. The focus is on two aspects which would have impacted on local audiences and their reception of the play, namely the particular South African setting of the play, and its sociohistorical context. The three aspects foregrounded by the play's title: the aspect of 'indentured race-based servitude' as reflected in the title, Mies Julie; the Bantu Land Act, and thirdly, the Immorality Act, as reflected in the subtitle, are discussed in some detail to demonstrate why the political is more personal for local audiences than for international audiences.

Keywords: Yaël Farber; *Mies Julie;* Natives Land Act of 1913; Immorality Act; post-apartheid theatre; reception studies

1 Introduction

Since Susan Bennett's ground-breaking book, *Theatre Audiences* (1997), interest in spectator/audience reception studies in contemporary theatre studies has increased and one finds many works in this field that focus on the experiences of spectators and audiences from various perspectives. The focus is often on how the spectators or audiences experience the performance on various levels (emotionally, sensorially, aesthetically, intellectually, etc.). The various aspects which may influence how a spectator experiences any performance (inter alia, his or her own sociohistorical situation, belief systems, experience as a theatregoer or personal preferences) are also often discussed.

In this article I want to focus on a specific aspect, namely to try and demonstrate why South African audiences' experience of Yaël Farber's South African adaptation of a classic play, Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, would differ to some extent from international audiences' reception of the play. The question to be answered here is thus: How does the internationally acclaimed production of *Mies Julie* resonate with local South

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African audiences – especially in terms of the sociohistorical and political issues foregrounded by the subtitle of Farber's play. Although many of the issues addressed in this play do have universal relevance, Farber also acknowledged in an interview that for South African audiences this play would be a 'highly personal experience' and that it may even be 'unbearable', while for international audiences it is mainly a theatrical experience.[1]

Yaël Farber's adaptation (2012) of August Strindberg's classic play, *Miss Julie*, entitled *Mies Julie* and subtitled *Restitutions of Body and Soil since The Bantu Land Act No. 27 of 1913 and The Immorality Act No. 5 of 1927,* received rave reviews internationally, earned a great number of awards, had sold-out performances and often received standing ovations from various international audiences. Issues often mentioned in many of the international reviews of this production include: (1) the highly charged eroticism of the play and the explicit sex scenes between the two main characters; (2) the contemporary South African context in which the adaptation is placed; and (3) comparative references to other adaptations of Strindberg's play.

After a short discussion of the international reception of this play, I will focus in more detail on two aspects which would have impacted on local audiences and their reception of the play, namely: (1) the particular South African setting of the play; and (2) its sociohistorical context. Farber's play is set in contemporary South Africa (Freedom Day, 2012, on a farm in the Karoo), 18 years after the 1994 democratic elections. The use of an Afrikaans form of address, *'mies',* in the title, as well the indication in the character list that Mies Julie is the 'Afrikaans daughter of a farmer' (Farber 2012, p. 9), immediately introduces a very specific sociopolitical framework for the play. The surname of the white family who own the farm, given later in the text (Farber 2012), is a well-known Afrikaans surname, Meyer. The context of the play is foregrounded in the subtitle, where two of the most contentious laws in South African sociopolitical history are formally stated, namely the Natives Land Act and the Immorality Act. Many of the international reviewers and commentators of the play referred to the South African sociopolitical setting and the historical context of the play and mentioned that Farber's play reflects a society that is still racially divided and grappling with many issues almost two decades after holding its first democratic elections. These issues would probably be of some interest to international audiences, but for South African theatre audiences, confronted daily by them, the topicality of these aspects would probably be or have been integral to their reception of this play.

The focus in this discussion of Farber's *Mies Julie* will be on the three aspects foregrounded by the play's title: firstly, the aspect of 'indentured race-based servitude', noted by Hutchings, as reflected in the title, *Mies Julie*; secondly, the Natives Land Act and, thirdly, the Immorality Act, as reflected in the subtitle, *Restitutions of Body and Soil Since The Bantu Land Act No. 27 of 1913 and The Immorality Act No. 5 of 1927*. Although international audiences probably have some awareness of these three issues as part of their general knowledge of South Africa and their familiarity with the ideology of apartheid (as mentioned by most international reviewers), local audiences are naturally more aware of these issues and the tensions created by them within a diverse society. The reception of this play locally confirms this observation, as will be discussed below. As a South African (Afrikaans-speaking) spectator attending a performance of this play at the Edinburg Theatre Festival in 2012, as part of a cosmopolitan audience, I was perhaps even more aware of the South African

references and, more specifically, the use of Afrikaans in this play than would have been the case if I had seen the play in South Africa.

Although the play was generally also received with great acclaim in South Africa, there were a few dissenting voices – mainly from Afrikaans reviewers – which indicates that the three aspects mentioned above are still contentious issues in South African society.

The focus of this article, in terms of spectator/audience reception, will be on the sociopolitical and historical context, which South African audiences probably brought to their experience of the play when they attended performances in South Africa. As Christopher Balme and Tracy Davis (2015, p. 4) state in a recent article in *Theatre Survey* entitled 'Spectatorship', the old notion of a 'horizon of expectation', as introduced by Jauss in reception studies, is still a relevant notion when discussing spectators' reception of a play. According to Balme and Davis (2015, p. 4):

> The 'horizon of expectation' is determined by previous experiences and background knowledge that the spectator brings to the performance. … It acts not only on an aesthetic level – recognition of stage conventions, style of acting, narrative patterns and so on – but also within an ideological frame. Spectators bring with them ideological conditioning via familial, ethnic, and class ties; education; and religious affiliations.

It is especially this 'ideological frame' that South Africans bring to their reception of this play that I want to focus on. South African audiences will naturally bring more political/historical associations and entrenched local experiences to their reception of the play compared to international audiences. It is presumed that the political is thus more personal for local audiences than would be the case for an international audience.

2 International reception of Farber's *Mies Julie*

The international reception of *Mies Julie* has been overwhelmingly positive and I quote a few reviewers below.

Christopher Hoile (2014, pp. 3–4) states:

> *Mies Julie* is a shattering experience, sometimes so disturbing it is difficult to watch. … Farber's adaptation renews the power of Strindberg's original and finds in it a commentary on the convergence of sexual, racial and social politics relevant the world over. *Mies Julie* is simply one of the must-see theatre events of the year.

Peter Marks (2013, p. 1) reports: 'Sometimes, the rawest ingredients yield the deepest flavors, as the basic instinct-driven power players passionately demonstrate in "Mies Julie", the captivating South African reincarnation of August Strindberg's "Miss Julie".'

Ben Brantley (2012, p. 1) declares:

> The temperature never stops rising in Yaël Farber's 'Mies Julie', a play for which 'scorcher' is way too mild a description. … In translating Strindberg's 1888 tale of love, class and madness into contemporary South Africa, Ms Farber has created a parched and blistered world in which every living soul is highly combustible tinder, and the rules for living keep melting.[2]

A longer discussion of the play is given by William Hutchings in an article entitled, 'Post-Colonial Strindberg: Yaël Farber's South African *Mies Julie*'. Hutchings (2014, pp. 69–70) captures most of the important issues of Farber's *Mies Julie* in the following passage:

> Whereas the 2009 production of Patrick Marber's *After Miss Julie* forwarded the play into 1945 and set it in Britain, the 2012 production written and directed by Yaël Farber and entitled *Mies Julie* takes place in post-apartheid South Africa. Accordingly, it quite boldly re-imagines Strindberg's plot, complicating its central characters' relationships via inter-racial conflicts and issues of ownership of the land, ownership of the nation, and ownership of their individual bodies, not only in the sexual sense of that term but also in the context of indentured race-based servitude as well.

Although most international reviewers mentioned the South African setting and context of the play, it is often the eroticism and sexual explicitness of the play that they highlight. Many reviewers (like those quoted above) described the interactions between Julie and John as both emotionally intense and as having a choreographed physical quality, which heightened the impact of these scenes on the spectator. Christopher Hoile (2014, p. 3) notes in his review:

> The play is almost as much a physical theatre piece as it is spoken theatre. Accompanied by music by Daniel and Matthew Pencer, played live by Brydon Bolton and Mark Fransman, Mantsai and Cronje's [the two actors – MK] interactions are choreographed in the manner of highly acrobatic modern dance. An initial sequence of attraction and repulsion, with John's repulsing of Julie growing weaker each time, culminates in intercourse after which their actions reverse that first sequence moving from closeness to stronger and stronger repulsion.

Although most South African audiences will probably agree with the above descriptions of the play in terms of its erotic and physical impact on spectators, the political background and context of these actions will, however, be an added component in their reception of the play.

3 The South African adaptation of Strindberg's *Miss Julie*

Many of the international reviewers mention that Strindberg's *Miss Julie* has been adapted many times over the years (apparently more than 20 times). More recent adaptations include Marber's reworking of the play, entitled *After Miss Julie,* in 2009, and a 2012 Chinese opera version directed by Ravel Luo.

Within the South African context, it is perhaps worth mentioning another example of the adaptation of a well-known classic that has been performed in South African theatres since 1994 (post-apartheid), namely Janet Suzman's *The Free State,* which is, as indicated in her subtitle, 'A South African Response to Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard*' (2000). It is interesting to compare Suzman's 1994 play with Farber's 2012 play, since both dramatists transpose well-known classic plays into a post-1994 South African idiom. Both chose to change every element of the source text (*The Cherry Orchard*/*Miss Julie*) in writing their texts (*The Free State*/*Mies Julie*): setting, characters and language.

Suzman's play is set on a farm (in the Clocolan area) in the Free State province, six months after the first democratic elections were held in South Africa in 1994, while

Farber's play is set on a farm in the Eastern Cape (in the Karoo) on Freedom Day in 2012. In both cases these particular places and specified dates are very important and, within the South African context, various meanings can be associated with these dates and places.

In an article I wrote on Suzman's play (Keuris 2004, pp. 157–158) I note that:

> Suzman's use of the name *Free State,* to title her play, does not only indicate a geographical place or recall historical allusions, it is also a key indication of her intention with the play, namely to propagate her positive vision for a new South Africa in post-1994.

It is clear from her adaptation that she wanted to present a positive view of the 'new' South Africa and, as stated in a very long foreword, wanted to 'celebrate Mandela's vision'. Farber's play is set 18 years after the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, and her portrayal of the situation at this point in time is much less idealistic and positive than Suzman's – as will be demonstrated below.

2.1 *The South African setting*

The South African setting of Farber's play is stated as 'A farmhouse kitchen. Eastern Cape – Karoo, South Africa. Freedom Day 2012' (Farber 2012, p. 9).

For any South African spectator the title, *Mies Julie*, would already have been a clear indication of the South African setting of this play. The use of the word *'mies'* would be familiar to most Afrikaans speakers as well other language speakers in South Africa. It is an old form of address that is considered politically incorrect these days, since the word does carry with it the association of race-based servitude. Although this term of address is generally not used any longer (it has even been removed from a well-known Afrikaans dictionary, the HAT), it is still used in rural areas and often on farms. A derivative of *'mies'* is *'kleinmies',* which was used (and sometimes is still used) to refer to young white girls – even if they are still children. It was used by the domestic helpers to show deference to the white females in a household – even if the helper was much older than the child.

The male form of address, *'baas'* (master or boss), is used in the play to refer to Julie's previous fiancé, 'Baas Jan' (Farber 2012, p. 11, p. 46). Julie's father is referred to by John and his mother, Christine, as *'meneer'* (Afrikaans for 'sir') – today, a more acceptable way of referring to or addressing your boss. It is, however, clear from the references made to him by the various characters (even his own daughter) that he is a violent, racist man. Julie states at the beginning of the play: 'Niemand sal aan my raak nie [No one will touch me]. My pa will shoot the black man in the head that puts his hands on me. Then he'll shoot me. Told me that once when I was little. That was my bedtime story' (Farber 2012, 15). Christine and Johan also make remarks confirming these harsh qualities of her father, with John stating 'He's a hard boer' (Farber 2012, p. 13), and Christine, 'This is Meneer's land. He decides. Finished and klaar' (Farber 2012, p. 14).

The use of the name *'boer'* will also resonate with many associations for South African audiences. Although it is correctly stated in the text that the word translates as 'farmer', it is also a term of address that is often used to refer to Afrikaners (even if they are not farmers) or to white policemen. The slogan, 'Kill the Boer, kill the farmer', attributed to Peter Mokaba (president of the ANC Youth

League in the 1990s), was often used at political rallies, but it was ruled as hate speech by the South African Human Rights Commission in 2003. This slogan/song surfaces at political gatherings even today and its defenders claim that it is simply an old 'struggle song' and a reminder of South Africa's past. However, opponents of this slogan/song state that the word *'boer'* is a reference to all white people in South Africa and that it incites violence against whites and should therefore be banned. This slogan has also been criticized by farmers, who believe that it plays a role in the high number of farm murders and attacks on white farmers over the past two decades.

It is quite appropriate that Farber would have chosen, in her adaptation of Strindberg's play to the South African context, to use a white *Afrikaner* girl in relation to a black Xhosa man, since this choice brings with it even more layers of associations and potential for dramatic conflict than would have been the case if she had simply chosen to use a white English-speaking South African girl and English-speaking farmer. This choice has, however, also made some Afrikaans-speaking spectators unhappy. For example, in a well-known online literary journal, *LitNetAkademies*, Albert Maritz (an Afrikaans actor and director) mentions in his review of the play that a fellow Afrikaans director who saw this play called it 'Afrikaner-bashing' and the farmer is depicted as a racist *'boer',* a stereotypical portrayal of white farmers.

The choice of 'Freedom day' to situate the dramatic events is also a date that would resonate more with South African audiences than with international audiences. This day, 27 April, is celebrated as a public holiday in South Africa to commemorate the first democratic elections. On this day in 1994 all South Africans from all the racial groups could vote for the first time. In the play, however, it is clear that what is supposed to be a celebration of their freedom is still fraught with tensions for many black South Africans. John, for instance, refers to 'squatters' who are occupying the farm and whom the farmer wants to get rid of, adding: 'A storm is coming to this farm. The workers are celebrating Freedom tonight, but there is anger on the wind out there' (Farber 2012, p. 13).

The use of two South African languages (Afrikaans and isiXhosa) also clearly situates this play in South Africa and in a particular region (Eastern Cape). One international blogger for the Canadian newspaper *The Province* (2012, p. 1), J. Wasserman, remarked that the use of these languages did affect international audiences' reception of the play and that 'the sprinkling of Xhosa and Afrikaans dialogue, like some of the political and geographical references, makes random details of the play inaccessible to a Canadian audience'. Although it is true that many South African audiences will also not be fluent in these two languages, most of them will recognize the words (*'mies', 'baas',* the highly racist *'kaffir'*, as well as many other references) and their associated meanings within the various South African communities.

2.2 *The South African sociopolitical context*

Although the play is set in contemporary South Africa (2012) 18 years after the first democratic elections (the post-apartheid era), the two earlier infamous laws implemented even more rigorously by the previous National Party government are still part of the new South Africa – as Farber's subtitle for her play indicates.

2.2.1 *The Immorality Act No. 5 of 1927*

The Immorality Act No. 5 of 1927 was the first of a series of acts to prohibit sexual intercourse between so-called Europeans (whites) and so-called 'natives' (black people) in South Africa. The Act stated that it prohibited sexual intercourse 'outside of marriage', but in 1949 another Act (the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act) banned interracial marriages. A further piece of legislation, the Immorality Act of 1957, renamed the Sexual Offences Act in 1957, increased the penalty imposed under the 1927 Act, which was five-years imprisonment for the man and four years for the woman, to seven-years imprisonment for both. It was only in 1985, with the Immorality and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Amendment Act, that the 1957 Act was repealed.

In 1985 a production of Strindberg's *Miss Julie,* caused an uproar with South African audiences when a well-known white Afrikaans actress, Sandra Prinsloo, played opposite a black actor, John Kani, in a production directed by Bobby Heaney. South African audiences, for the first time, saw an interracial kiss on a South African stage. The play premiered in 1985 at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. At the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, where it was shown next, it was greeted with a staged walkout by right-wing Afrikaners on the opening night. The Baxter Theatre archive still has copies of reviews, articles and even handwritten letters addressed to Ms Prinsloo (mainly in Afrikaans), which contain abusive and crude language that is shocking to read even today. Ms Prinsloo even received death threats for her portrayal of Julie and for kissing a black actor on stage.

Farber's 2012 adaptation of the same play did not prompt remotely the same reaction in South African audiences that the 1985 Heaney production generated in terms of the interracial relationship depicted on stage. Even though the interracial relationship in Farber's play is shown sexually explicitly on stage, this aspect doesn't seem to concern South African audiences as much these days as one might perhaps have expected. I consulted more than 30 South African reviews of this play on Sabinet (written for various theatres in the country) and, although a few reviewers mentioned the graphic nature of the sexual relations between John and Julie, none discussed this issue in much detail.

Although South African reviewers downplayed this feature of the play, it does seem from anecdotal reports that some South African spectators did find this aspect disturbing and that some spectators left the theatre when confronted with this relationship. This reaction, however, seems to be a minority response, with most spectators seemingly simply accepting an interracial relationship as a common occurrence in the new South Africa. The play did have an age restriction (18 years) and audiences were forewarned of the explicit sexual nature of the relationship between Julie and John. Most audiences would thus have been prepared for this portrayal, although its graphic nature did affect some spectators negatively (apparently some spectators left during performances held at the State Theatre in Pretoria and seemed to be very embarrassed by the show). According to a review written by Andile Ndlovu for *TimesLIVE* (2012, p. 3): 'Strong language and intense scenes of a sexual nature (and even a bit of nudity) in the play seemed to make the audience squirm in their seats.'

Although South African theatre reviewers mentioned the explicitly erotic scenes depicted in the play, this aspect was mentioned more often by foreign theatre reviewers

when it played in the UK, US and other countries. A review in *The Washington Post* written by Celia Wren (2013, p. 4) quotes Yaël Farber as saying that she 'realized that she didn't want to foreground the fact that her protagonists are of different races, because interracial relationships are "not so shocking" in South Africa today'. This comment is followed with a reference made to the 1985 South African production of *Miss Julie,* which generated an extreme audience reaction to the interracial depiction of this relationship. It thus seems as if, for South African audiences at least, the portrayal of interracial relationships on stage – however sexually explicit they may be – is no longer really a contentious issue. Interestingly enough, in the same review Farber shares the opinion that this aspect still seemed to hold a lot of interest for American audiences: 'Farber says she was struck by the way American audiences, for their part, seemed to focus on the interracial aspect of "Mies Julie" in New York. … That interracial aspect of it was so powerful to an American audience. I thought it was very revealing.'

The Immorality Act was the inspiration for another well-known South African playwright, Athol Fugard, whose *Statements after an arrest under the Immorality Act* (1972) was used to open the Space Theatre in Cape Town (the first theatre to play to non-racial audiences). In a new production of this play in 2012 at the Fugard Theatre in Cape Town, the two main characters (white female and black male) played in the nude for the duration of the play, without causing a stir (audiences were, however, forewarned). The reception of this production (performed the same year as Farber's *Mies Julie*) thus supports Farber's remark that interracial nudity is now accepted by most South African audiences. (Interestingly enough, this production by Kim Kerfoot was also playing at the Edinburgh Theatre festival in 2012 at the same time as Farber's *Mies Julie*.)

For a South African spectator, either being part of an international audience or of a South African audience, the interracial sexual content of the play could be disturbing (especially if your perspective is conservative). There are, however, other aspects which will probably be equally – if not more – disturbing to the reception of the play that I want to focus on in the following section.

2.2.2 *The Bantu Land Act No. 27 of 1913*

The Natives Land Act 27 of 1913 (as it was first called) was signed by Lord Gladstone on 16 June 1913. According to Dobson (2013, p. 29), 'wide-scale dispossession of land' had already taken place before 1913 and 'a host of earlier land laws in the Cape and Natal colonies and the Boer republics had also forced African people from their land'. By 1913, however, almost a million African tenant farmers were living on white-owned land as rent-paying tenants or as share croppers (i.e. paying half their crop as rental) or as labour tenants. The Natives Land Act included a so-called *Schedule of Native Areas,* which listed the land (e.g. reserves, farms) where Africans could stay and forbade all other agreements in terms of land acquisition, rental and so forth outside of these defined spaces. The Act thus immediately outlawed two forms of tenancy, namely rental tenancy and share cropping. A direct result of the implementation of this Act was the displacement of people on a massive scale.

The Act was amended in 1936 (The Native Trust and Land Act 18 of 1936, the so-called Trust Act) to make provision for the transfer of more land to the reserves (6.2 million hectares). According to Dobson (2013, p. 31):

> … apart from the forced removals, which followed immediately upon their promulgation, these two Acts, directly and indirectly, formed the basis for a massive and intensified campaign of forced removals by the apartheid government during the period from 1960 to 1983, when more than 3.4 million people were forcibly removed.

One of the first laws to be promulgated after the 1994 democratic elections was the Restitution of Lands Rights Act 22 of 1994 and Parliament subsequently established a Commission on Restitution of Land Rights to investigate, negotiate and settle land claims. The cut-off date for the lodging of claims was 31 December 1998 and by that time almost 80,000 claims had been lodged. Although a large number of these claims have been settled, almost 3,000 still need to be finalized. The process has not been easy or simple and many contentious issues complicate the matter to this day (e.g. productive land that has been abandoned and has fallen into disrepair; problems experienced around the 'willing seller, willing buyer' concept, the emotive issue of farm murders, etc.).

In the text Yaël Farber also quotes from Sol Plaatje's book, *Native Life in South Africa, Before and Since the European War and the Boer Rebellion,* published in 1916, in which he writes the following really prophetic words of what was in store for black people in the years and decades to come in terms of land ownership: 'Awaking on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African Native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth.'

Farber has stated in a number of interviews that for her the land issue is the real problem in contemporary South Africa and that she also wanted to show the complexities of this issue in her play through the characters of Julie and John. Interviewing Farber, Celia Wren (2013, p. 4) wrote in *The Washington Post*:

> Farber wanted to highlight the question of land ownership, which she believes to be 'the really vibrating, volatile issue' in South Africa today. It's an issue rendered painful by the specifics of history: colonialism and, subsequently, apartheid's system of white privilege had a deep effect on property-ownership patterns in South Africa.

Farber also stated in an interview conducted for *The Guardian* by Bim Adewunmi (2013, p. 2):

> Land is the cornerstone of apartheid – the Group Areas Act, the Natives Land Act. Those acts were about taking land and enforcing control over it. Although the acts have been done away with, the symptoms are still around. But I didn't want to make an obvious 'that was stolen' or 'certain people have a right to it' narrative. John says, 'My people are buried here beneath the floor.' And Julie replies, 'Well, mine are buried out beneath the willow tree, three generations back.' That is the reality for a lot of families living and working on those farms.

Both characters refer back to the past when arguing about the land issue: John to his ancestors and Julie to the graves of her forefathers. The 'soil' has a history for both of them: John's ancestors with colonialism and Julie's with the Afrikaner 'Voortrekkers', with British imperialism and wars with the indigenous black tribes of Southern Africa. The land is associated with blood ('red dust') and graves. For Julie (Farber 2012, p. 36) these associations have become hard to bear: 'My father's already got his grave marked out next to my ma. And his parents. And theirs. All the way back to the Voortrekkers.

There's a spot reserved for me too – but they can give that red dust to someone else. What are we staying for? Graves and soil?'

The link between 'soil' and 'soul' is thus made through these associations by Julie. When John confronts her with the possibility that she can now be impregnated by him ('What if you're carrying my child' [Farber 2012, p. 41]), he makes explicit the body and soil/soul association ('Then this land will return to the rightful owners … . This is restitution. Of body and soil' (Farber 2012, pp. 41–42). For Julie (Farber 2012, p. 56) this is unacceptable: 'You think my body your restitution? My womb your land grab?'

The play in the subtitle ('restitution of body and soil') with the phrase 'body and soul' is not only an exchanging of 'soul' for 'soil' in order to link the Natives Land Act and the Immorality Act. By superimposing 'soil' on 'soul' the two words also become interlinked. By taking away the soil (the land), your soul is also attacked and needs to be restored. 'Blood' links these two words, and highlights its connotation with violence (a bloody history for both blacks and Afrikaners; the 'red' soil; the covenant at Blood River; the blood on Julie's thighs after intercourse and her bloody death when she disembowels herself with a farm implement (the sickle). Although 'freedom' arrived in South Africa in 1994, unresolved tensions persist below the surface, like an ancestor trying to break through a kitchen floor (Farber 2012, p. 18, p. 57) or the 'memories' Julie recalls while dying (Farber 2012, pp. 56–57). Julie's 'memories' clearly refer to an earlier period in Afrikaner history, namely the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), when the British used a scorched earth policy to destroy Afrikaner farms, while many women and children died in the war concentration camps. Although John tells her that 'these memories are not yours' (Farber 2012, p. 56), Julie's last words are a request to be buried with 'these memories', with her family 'in the red earth' (Farber 2012, p. 57). Through these words Julie affirms her commitment to her Afrikaner past and her own connection to the land ('soil') of her ancestors.

The use of the k-word by both John and Julie is an interesting indication of how the relationship between the races has changed in the 'new' South Africa. The use of this word by both characters is ironically a sign of greater equality between the races. It is clear that John often uses this designation as provocation and to hurt Julie. Although she states during various interactions with John that she rejects the use of the k-word and its counterpart ('mies' Julie), during some of their confrontations she also uses this word with the clear intention to humiliate and hurt him. While the k-word has in the past often been used by a particular racist white group in South Africa, and black workers seemed to accept this practice in silence, an interesting change has now taken place. In their conversations John and Julie both use the k-word and is it not only Julie, but even more so John, who uses this word to articulate their emotions. The anger of the 'submissive' servant or worker of the past has now burst into the open and is part of John's verbal and physical confrontations with the Afrikaner 'mies'.

Julie herself breaks with the tradition of the old Afrikaner *meisie* (girl) when she breaks one of the great taboos of Afrikaner woman (*volksmoeder*/mother of the nation) by engaging in a sexual relationship with a black man. The old Afrikaner *volksmoeder* was seen as the patroness of racial purity for the Afrikaner *volk* and, as an Afrikaner *meisie*, Julie should have upheld this taboo. Her suicide at the end of the play is in a sense a return to the old order: no child will be born from this relationship and Mies Julie will be buried with her Afrikaner ancestors. John may have possessed Julie's body for a short period, but true reconciliation still seems to be far off between the two races and the land issue continues to be unresolved between them.

Conclusion: restitution of body and soil

Ownership of body and land/soil must be returned to the disenfranchised in order for body and soul to be reunited. This is, however, not a simple process – especially not in contemporary South Africa.

Farber is correct in recognising that of the two issues mentioned in the play, the land restitution issue in South Africa is far less resolved than the legacy of the Immorality Act. Although interracial relationships are still frowned upon by a small conservative section of the population in South Africa today, the issue regarding land claims and land restitution is much more contentious and often leads to polarization between the races. Since this issue is still unresolved and many opposing viewpoints within the various communities still prevail, it is probably the main reason why the play was not accepted quite as enthusiastically by all audiences in South Africa as was the case in the rest of the world.

Suzman's *The Free State* (2000) was perhaps presumptuous in celebrating the freedom of South Africa too early, in a play situated in 1994, and in depicting the establishment of a new dispensation as a relatively easy transition for all South Africans. The euphoria of that year has dissipated and the idealism of a so-called *rainbow nation* destroyed. Farber's assessment of the nation 18 years later, in *Mies Julie,* shows a polarized society battling to come to grips with the remnants of its past. Her representation of tensions in contemporary South African society is, for South African audiences, a reality, which they will have to address themselves – a reality which international audiences can empathize with, but not experience in quite the same way.

Notes

1. In an interview in a local Afrikaans newspaper (*Beeld*) on 8 September 2012 Farber told Anna-Retha Bouwer that: 'Vir plaaslike gehore is dit 'n hoogs persoonlike ervaring om na *Mies Julie* te kyk. Ons het meestal gevind Suid-Afrikaners was opgewonde oor dit wat die stuk ondersoek. Vir ander was dit ondraaglik.' ('For local audiences it is a highly personal experience to see *Mies Julie.* We usually found that South Africans were excited about what the play was exploring. For others it was unbearable.' [author's translation])
2. Artslink.co.za gives under the header *High praise and awards for Baxter's Mies Julie* [accessed 22 August 2012] a long list of references to various international reviewers (especially reviews written during the 2012 Edinburgh theatre festival), which can be read to get an idea of how overwhelming positively this play was received internationally. It mentions, for example, that 'five-star reviews were received from more than 10 arts reviewers in publications which include *The Scotsman*, *The Guardian*, *The Herald*, *London Evening Standard*, *The Times*, British Theatre Guide *What'sOnStage*, *ScotsGay Magazine* and *Three Weeks*, as well as numerous blogs'.

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